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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 001552

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DEPARTMENT FOR P, EUR, EUR/SCE
PASS TO NSC (BRAUN/AINSLEY)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KV](#) [BH](#) [SR](#)
SUBJECT: SERBIA: PRESIDENT TADIC AND PRIME MINISTER KOSTUNICA ON THE
ROAD AHEAD

REF: BELGRADE 1411

BELGRADE 00001552 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CAMERON MUNTER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador met Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica November 7 and President Tadic November 9. Kostunica was guarded but cordial, Tadic open and realistic. Tadic agreed to continue public statements condemning violence in days to come; Kostunica demurred, saying such statements would just draw attention to possible incidents. Both agreed to temper their statements on Bosnia, though both expressed solidarity with RS PM Dodik and criticized the actions taken by Hirep Lajcak. Kostunica repeated his conviction that any unilateral action in Kosovo would ignite a regional conflict. Kostunica confirmed that dates for Serbian presidential elections would be announced only after December 10, when legislation governing elections and presidential functions had passed; Tadic said he believed elections would take place in January, and expressed growing confidence in his ability to win. Most important, Kostunica is clearly prepared to resist the loss of Kosovo to the end, while Tadic has made an important step: while he isn't happy with the outcome of an independent Kosovo, he is prepared for it and explicitly willing to work with us to manage the transition, hoping that he can protect his strategic goal of promoting Serbian integration into the west.
END SUMMARY.

THE ODD COUPLE

¶2. (C) Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica met the Ambassador one-on-one November 7. He was guarded but cordial, clearly seeking to portray himself as a reasonable man. He discussed at length the Hong Kong model put forth at the latest Vienna meeting of the Belgrade and Pristina leadership under the auspices of the troika, arguing that he could not compromise on the issue of Serbian sovereignty over Kosovo. He said it was an attempt to be specific and illustrative using ideas the Serbs had suggested previously. Ambassador asked Kostunica how Pristina had received the model, and Kostunica said: badly. Ambassador noted that, ultimately, Pristina would be his audience. Kostunica said the Serbs would redouble their efforts at the next meeting on November 20.

¶3. (C) Serbian President Tadic, meeting with the Ambassador two days later, was much more direct. He blamed Pristina for rejecting the Hong Kong model and the Russian suggestion of a confederal relationship (though he nodded when Ambassador noted that Kostunica too had rejected this option in Vienna). Tadic said the Serbs would continue to suggest fresh ideas to the end, but noted that he had two goals: not to abandon Serbia's legitimate goals in Kosovo, and to ensure that, whatever happened, there was peace.

¶4. (C) Ambassador requested that both Kostunica and Tadic make frequent public statements that, whatever the outcome in Kosovo,

violence would not be tolerated. Tadic readily agreed to this request. Kostunica did not, claiming that such statements would draw unneeded attention to the prospect of violence. Ambassador urged Kostunica to reconsider, as his silence would likely be understood as toleration, even encouragement, of extremist actions.

GETTING REAL

15. (C) Where Kostunica was unwilling to engage in discussions of the "day after," Tadic enthusiastically engaged in a discussion of what he called "planning for the worst." While Tadic claimed he was worried that a UDI could lead to regional violence and declared he would do what he could to prevent it, he reiterated his commitment above all to a peaceful solution. Tadic recalled the events of March 2004, and expressed some doubt about KFOR's ability to respond appropriately. Ambassador reassured Tadic that KFOR too had learned from 2004, and that his own military was in close touch with KFOR's leadership to ensure swift action if necessary to keep the peace. He stressed the importance of restraint on the part of both Kosovars and Serbs and the danger should either or both sides respond with force. The Ambassador expressed gratitude for the Tadic's remarks on the role of the army and the importance of cross-border military contacts to share information and to maintain order in the hot spots, and emphasized the need to go beyond traditional contingency planning. Tadic said that he would not order a military action without talking to the Ambassador. Ambassador responded that any Serbian military action in Kosovo was unacceptable, period. Tadic appeared to accept this red line but said nothing. (Comment: Tadic, Defense Minister Sutanovac, and CHOD Ponos have repeated many times that the Serbian Army will not fight in Kosovo. We believe Tadic's statement may be the result of pressure from Kostunica and his allies to put a military option back on the table.)

BOSNIA: CRITICISM OF LAJCAK

BELGRADE 00001552 002.2 OF 003

16. (C) Tadic emphatically affirmed his interest in upholding international law and stabilizing the situation in Republika Srpska (RS). In Brussels and to high-level U.S. officials, he claimed, he had stated "one hundred times" his opposition to partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tadic observed that he could advance a legal/historical argument that RS and Serbia were, in fact, one nation, but said that he would not insist on this line because of the political consequences and sensitivities. He repeated Serbia's commitment to stability in the region and the country's support for Dayton. The president commented that the timing of Hirep Lajcak's initiatives, coinciding with Serbia's impending loss of Kosovo, was dangerous and problematic for Serbia. Remarking on Lajcak's service as Ambassador to Serbia and his "unhelpful involvement" in the break up of the Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Tadic doubted the OHR had understood how his actions would play in Serbia.

17. (C) Kostunica too had expressed his criticism of Lajcak's reforms, and provided a long account of why Dayton was in essence a mechanism chiefly created to support the rights of the constituent countries. Lajcak, he said, had attacked the very basis of Dayton. Ambassador countered that Dayton was also the agreement that specifically gave Lajcak his powers, and that it was up to Lajcak, in this capacity, to see that Bosnia was well governed and the needs of its peoples met. In any event, Ambassador urged Kostunica to avoid making the situation worse in Bosnia, and allowing the Bosnians themselves to resolve the situation. Kostunica said he believed the situation had indeed calmed in recent days (he claimed not to be informed about latest developments) and said he would watch closely "and quietly." Kostunica said he believed the United States needed a comprehensive policy on the Balkans rather than seeing it in pieces. Ambassador countered that it was precisely in the interest of regional stability that we believed Kosovo's status must be resolved, and Dayton protected.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

¶8. (C) Kostunica confirmed that that the ruling coalition had agreed not to choose a date for Serbia's presidential elections until after December 10, when law governing the role of the presidency and the procedure of elections would be passed. Kostunica also confirmed that he had not given his party's support to Tadic. The agreement, Kostunica said, called for elections not to take place if Serbia's territorial integrity was threatened; asked by the Ambassador to define "threatened," Kostunica answered "UDI" - that is, it would take a Kosovar independence declaration, rather than the possibility of such a declaration, to postpone elections.

¶9. (C) Tadic said he believed democratic leaders would pay the price of Kosovo's independence at the polls. Having agreed with coalition partners to delay announcement of presidential elections until after December 10, Tadic said that he expected the first round of elections would take place in mid January. The expected schedule, he said, linked his success with the Kosovo endgame. "I am in the hands of the Albanians," he said. "If they shoot in Presevo Valley, I am in trouble." Tadic seemed more confident of polling data showing him firmly in front in the run-up to a possible showdown with the expected Radical candidate Nikolic, and expected that these elections would take place in January.

MANAGING TOUGH TIMES

¶10. (C) Tadic said that U.S. recognition of a unilateral declaration of Kosovo independence would create serious problems in bilateral relations. Preparing for the worst-case scenario, Tadic said, it would be important to maintain candid, immediate communications with the Ambassador. Despite serious difficulties he anticipated, Tadic said he hoped that, in the tough times, Serbia and the United States would find a way to work together. He explicitly repeated his commitment to a Euro-Atlantic future with Serbian membership in both the EU and NATO.

¶11. (C) Kostunica, on the other hand, is playing his cards very close to the vest. He reiterated to the Ambassador his commitment to a European future for Serbia, despite press reports that he has grown increasingly close to the Russians. He, and especially some of his lieutenants, have maintained a tough public approach to Kosovo (Minister for Kosovo Samardzic has pointedly rejected all prospective solutions to Kosovo in the troika talks that do not explicitly support Serbian sovereignty over Kosovo).

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Tadic recognizes his responsibility to maintain public order and we believe that he will refrain from intemperate public predictions of violence, urging calm, instead. He seems to have concluded that he needs to work through tough times rather than

BELGRADE 00001552 003.2 OF 003

resist them. His approach was supported by Foreign Minister Jeremic in a November 9 meeting with the Ambassador: they see what's coming, and they're telling us they want to manage the post UDI process.

¶13. (C) But Kostunica is the Prime Minister, and as such has greater power to cause difficulty in Kosovo. He is reserved for now, but we believe he may still be willing to cause trouble after a UDI in an effort to prove that his dire warnings about Kosovar independence are indeed accurate.

¶14. (C) We continue to have a problem, both with Tadic and with Kostunica, over Bosnia. Tadic believes that we misunderstand Bosnia; Kostunica will, in our opinion, exploit any opportunities he can to portray himself as the champion of aggrieved Serbs, be they in RS or Serbia proper. Not only we, but also the British and French have told Kostunica to moderate his public statements on Bosnia. We've also urged Tadic to stay out of the press on Bosnian issues. For the last few days, both have been quiet. But we must watch Bosnia - and the Serbian leadership's approach to Bosnia - very carefully in the days to come. End Comment.

MUNTER